

[By Jenna Pizzi](#)

The state's food stamp program, 3SquaresVT, is at risk of losing \$200 million over the next 10 years due to federal cuts in the 2012 budget.

U.S. Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., met with delegates from a number of the state's food assistance programs on Tuesday to talk about the impact the cuts would have if the budget is passed by the Senate.

The budget as passed by the House last week cuts \$127 billion of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program nationwide over 10 years. Experts said these cuts would mean a \$147 less for a family of four in Vermont each month.

Angela Smith-Dieng, a representative from Hunger Free Vermont, is collecting stories of those who use state food assistance in order to show legislators the effect the cuts would have on real people.

Smith-Dieng said a mother of two from Montpelier uses \$500 a month in food stamps and still has trouble making ends meet.

"She said she would eight out of 10 times try to feed her kids before paying her utility bills," Smith-Dieng said.

During the roundtable discussion Tuesday at the Vermont Foodbank, representatives from all regions of the state remarked that more people than you would think use food assistance. Welch said he was shocked when Chris Meehan, chief of programs and network services at the Vermont Foodbank said the Sheffield food shelf saw 70 new families this month.

"We don't have a great economy but people still need to eat," Welch said.

Welch applauded the organizations for running their programs so efficiently. Ninety percent of the funding goes directly to the beneficiaries. Meehan said the Vermont Foodbank is efficient because the majority of the staff are volunteers.

Food stamps also benefit stores and the greater community because they keep more people employed, said Jim Harrison, president of the Grocers' Association. Each dollar spent in food stamps, above and beyond its value for purchasing groceries, translates to about \$1.84 for the community, he said, when these indirect benefits are taken into account.

"Those dollars do have a footprint and an impact," Harrison said. "We can't lose sight of the fact that taking them away does have other costs."

The organizations fear that with other cuts slotted for other public assistance programs, there may be an even larger burden placed on food programs.

Welch vowed that Senators Bernard Sanders and Patrick Leahy would fight the cuts in the Senate.

"They are going to push back," Welch said. "We've got to push back for a fair budget."